

## 2006 Session Wrap

### The best possible start in life

We need to invest in children to give them a good foundation and the best possible start in life, that's why this session we created the Department of Early Learning. This new agency brings together child care and preschool programs that were scattered among different state agencies.

By elevating early learning issues in the new department, our state will maximize resources and increase accountability. Private and nonprofit organizations will find it easier to partner with the state to make investments that improve and enhance existing programs. The new department will help Washington youngsters get to kindergarden ready to learn.



### Health care coverage for every child

In 1994, Washington State expanded eligibility for health care coverage for low-income children. By August 2005, we were covering a half-million children in low-income working families. But that wasn't enough, as health care costs continue to rise, more and more employers are dropping family coverage for their employees, which leaves thousands of kids without coverage every year.



You'll remember last session we made the commitment to give basic health care coverage to all the children of Washington by 2010. Last year we budgeted 73,000 enrollments and this session, in the supplemental budget, we added another 7,000, so we anticipate that by the end of the biennium there'll be an additional 80,000 low-income children in state health programs.

It's not only a question of doing what is morally right: giving kids medical attention; it's also a smart business decision to treat children early with preventive medicine, rather than wait until they need emergency care, which ends up being more expensive for the community at large.

### Medicare Rx Drug co-pays

The controversial federal Medicare prescription drug benefit transferred roughly 100,000 of our state's most vulnerable residents from Medicaid to Medicare—and required co-pays for needed medicines. We provided \$18 million of funding so they won't be subjected to these co-pays.



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April 2006

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#### Committees:

- Higher Education and Workforce Training— *Chair*
- Appropriations
- Commerce and Labor
- Joint Legislative Economic Development Committee

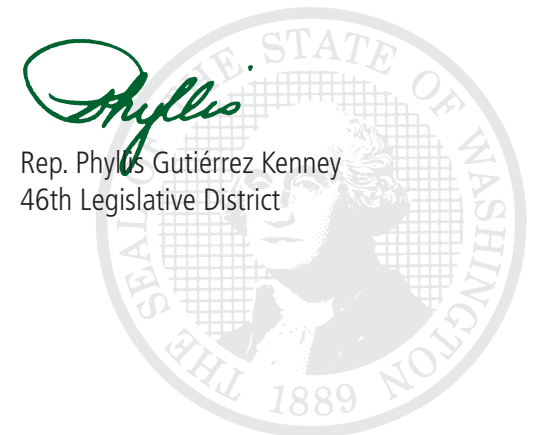
Dear Friends,

A lot has happened since my last update. This was a short, but hectic and intense session in the state Legislature. We worked on a wide variety of issues including improving health care, toughening our sex-offender laws, giving equal civil rights to everybody in our state, strengthening our education system, increasing access to higher education, and writing a responsible supplemental budget that saves \$2 for every \$1 invested.

I am very pleased with all the good things we accomplished this year for the people of Washington. Inside this newsletter you'll find a brief outline of some of these accomplishments, I hope you find it useful.

You are always welcome and encouraged to contact me with your comments and ideas. It has been a pleasure serving as your state representative and I look forward to continuing that service to you.

Sincerely,





# Representative Phyllis Gutiérrez Kenney

## 2006 Session Wrap

### Saving for the future

This year the Legislature managed to saved \$2 for every \$1 invested. We're putting away over \$941 million to pay off future costs associated with our state's pension system, education funding, and health care programs.

This budget builds on the Priorities of Government budgeting process from last year, with the aim of increasing government accountability. Working with our current performance audit laws, I'm confident this year's budget will help create stability for years to come.

### Historic compromise on liability-reform

Following the defeat of two competing ballot measures last November, the one advanced by trial lawyers and the other by the insurance industry, this session, through a bipartisan effort, we finally found a way to resolve the contentious issue of medical malpractice. Our solution is not just for doctors and it's not just for lawyers. It is for all the people who live in Washington state.

The ground-breaking compromise was led by Governor Gregoire, who used the House Democrats' bill as the basis of negotiations. The new policy agreement honors patient safety, insurance reform and civil justice reform.



*"My office is always open to you, come share your thoughts and ideas with me."*

### Civil rights for all

After almost thirty years of dedicated work, on January 31, 2006, the anti-discrimination bill was signed into Washington State law.

The new law does not give anyone special privileges; it gives everyone the same rights. It adds "sexual orientation" to existing prohibitions on discrimination in employment, housing, lending, and insurance on the basis of race, age, gender, disability, religion and marital status.

The anti-discrimination bill had the support of a diverse coalition of religious, civic, humanitarian, business, and professional organizations. Among the many companies backing this new law are Boeing, Microsoft, Starbucks, Safeco and Hewlett-Packard.

### The WASL

People are concerned about the Washington Assessment of Student Learning and with reason. Time and time again studies revealed that something needed to be done to help kids in our schools reach their graduation goals.



As part of the state's plan to give students a fair chance to earn their diploma, the legislature funded voluntary retakes this year for 11th-grade students. We also passed tutoring and summer school programs, as well as reasonable alternatives for students to demonstrate the mandatory skills needed to graduate.

### Ensuring our kids' safety

The safety and well-being of Washington's children has been one of my main priorities since I came into office. This year we took a hard look at our existing laws and passed legislation to further protect our families by giving prosecutors and law enforcement officers the resources they need to catch and convict sex offenders. Some of these bills create:



- mandatory 25-years-to-life sentences for child rape or molestation in the first degree committed by strangers or teachers, coaches and other trusted authority figures;
- round-the-clock GPS monitoring of sex offenders; and
- the crime of communicating with a minor through email or a computer for immoral purposes.

These measures place Washington among the top states with the toughest sex offender laws in the country. All of these bills passed with bipartisan approval and had the support of police officers, prosecutors and victims' advocates.

### Unemployment Insurance

We passed an historic and balanced compromise on unemployment insurance reform that lets workers get better benefits and employers a system that is affordable and sustainable. The new measure restores balance to the unemployment insurance system, after drastic cuts to benefits — especially for our construction and agricultural workers — were made in 2003.

This is a remarkable compromise that will restore equity and stability to Washington's unemployment insurance law.

### More training for more people statewide

Unless we want all the good jobs to go to other states or even other countries, we have to put more work into becoming truly competitive in this global economy. To do so, we must expand access to higher education throughout the state so that more Washingtonians get the tools they need to compete for —and get— those good jobs. This session we passed bills and made budget provisos that do just that, for example:

- WSU-Tri-Cities will expand to become a four-year program offering degrees in high-demand fields such as math, science, health care and engineering;
- North Snohomish, Island, and Skagit Counties will gain new four-year degree programs in a partnership between two- and four-year colleges centered on the Everett Community College campus. Two hundred fifty students will be able to enroll in high demand fields;



- Last year we opened up 7,900 new slots for students in our colleges and universities, and this session high demand fields such as nursing, engineering, math and science will be able to enroll an additional 500 new students in colleges across the state;
- We're funding a new program, Opportunity Grants, which will provide tuition, books, and other expenses to 400 low-income high school graduates or older adults so they can get the training they need to fill high-demand jobs;

- There's a persistent shortage of teachers in our state, so we're doing something about it before the situation gets worse: we're funding scholarships and loan forgiveness, as well as alternative certification programs to encourage more people to become teachers of math, science, bilingual education or special education; and

- We needed to do a better job at retaining teachers, so this year we're recognizing their years of experience and professional development: we approved pay and benefit improvements for community and technical college staff and faculty.

